

# 23-Year-Old Breast Cancer Survivor's Experiences Guide A National Research Program

Canadian Institutes of Health Research  
*Submitted*

Two years ago, Alicia Tait sat in a meeting room with a group of funders and researchers sharing her story of what it's like to be 23 and diagnosed with breast cancer. She hoped they'd have a better understanding of what women like her experience. Through early detection and screening, Alicia was among the 22,700 Canadian women who were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012.

Alicia says that her diagnosis was a shock and sent her mind spinning. "I had a four-month-old daughter," she says. "It raised the question of if I'd even be around to raise my daughter. Would I be able to graduate university, start a career in

teaching, and grow old with my husband? Would I be able to grow old at all?"

The 28-year-old mother of two children has since graduated university and completed teacher's college. "A cancer diagnosis at such a young age raises many questions about the future," she says. "You worry whether you'll be able to conceive another child. These are unique challenges when you're this young."

About 4% of newly diagnosed cases of breast cancer will be in women under 40. Breast cancer in younger women tends to be more advanced at the time of diagnosis as well as more aggressive and resistant to treatment. As a result, prognosis is generally worse for this age group. Many questions remain but there is much hope for newly diagnosed cancer patients, like

Alicia.

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation (CBCF) are funding a \$5.7M research project to study 1,200 newly diagnosed young women with all stages of breast cancer receiving care in 28 institutions across Canada. Led by Dr. Steven Narod, Canada Research Chair in Breast Cancer at Women's College Hospital in Toronto, the research teams across Canada aim to better understand the unique biology of breast cancer in women under 40 and its implications for prevention, risk reduction, and delivering care that addresses their distinct needs.

The researchers will also assemble a database of 3,000 young women who were diagnosed with breast cancer in

order to assess long term outcomes related to recurrence and survival. In this largest ever Canadian breast cancer in young women research program, women like Alicia will also gain a network that will provide them with additional support through their breast cancer journey.

Breast cancer continues to be the most common cancer among Canadian women (excluding non-melanoma skin cancers) and is the second leading cause of death from cancer. Research efforts play an important role in women's health and wellbeing and this project will result in real improvements for the young women who will face this diagnosis.



Billi J. Miller  
*Submitted*

June 20, 2007 started out like any other. I arrived at my office with the Government of Alberta in Edmonton. Then the news broke: 3 soldiers were killed in Afghanistan.

But, worse? Our dear friend and colleague Sherry Clark hadn't shown up for work that morning.

Her son Joel was there serving. Our hearts sank. Her phone call confirmed our fears.

Joel was one of the soldiers from the Edmonton-based Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) that had been hit by a roadside bomb.

He died a day before his 23rd birthday, along with: Cpl. Stephen Frederick Bouzane, 26 and Sgt. Christos Kariganis, 31.

August 10, 2014, marked the 100-year Anniversary that the PPCLI was incorporated – and just over 7 years since a mother lost her son.

In a recent interview, photojournalist Billi J. Miller spoke with Sherry Clark about what it means to lose a son.

What was your son's name and how long did he serve?

Private Joel Vincent Wiebe was part of 3rd Battalion PPCLI, and joined in September, 2004.

Where was he serving when he died?

Joel deployed on February 20, 2007 and was killed on June 20 2007 close to SperwanGhar, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan.

How many siblings does Joel have?

Joel had 3 sisters and has a nephew and three nieces. He also has two brothers from his Dad's 2nd marriage. Joel

was engaged to Anna and they were to be married in February, 2008 at the same Church where his funeral was.

What did Joel love the most in life?

Joel loved his family and friends deeply and was especially close to his sister Amanda. He loved being at home with Anna. Joel LOVED food (breakfast food). We used to joke that Joel joined the army for the daily bacon and eggs!

Joel was proud of the PPCLI. He loved the camaraderie and kinship and wore his uniform proudly.

What would you like to remember most about Joel?

Even though his time on earth was short, Joel left us with amazing memories! He was kind, and made people laugh and feel like they were his best friend.

When you were around Joel, you

felt safe, cared for, loved, and you laughed a lot! Joel was the glue of our family. He was a very stubborn young man too! He was a practical joker and loved pulling off a good prank!

He was one of those people you couldn't get mad at. He is our hero because of the way he lived and served!

Having been through this loss, what has it taught you about life and about love?

I have learned that a devastating loss has many emotions - heartache, desperation, emptiness, and shock, but it also brought pride.

I learned we don't always act the way we hope we would. A sad realization I live with now is that immediately following Joel's death, I wasn't a very good Mom to

my daughters.

I went through the motions of life but I barely functioned and I couldn't be the parent I should have been for my daughters.

I have learned that as sad as I am for our loss of Joel, I was even sadder for him and all that he would miss out on - his wedding, the chance to become a father.

I have learned that grief is a journey. I don't believe in "closure" and "getting over a loss". I believe you learn how to live with the loss.

I feel Joel's presence and there is no doubt that he is still watching over us.

The number of casualties from that mission grew to 158. Sherry continues to live in Edmonton.

## The Call



Joel celebrating one of his favorite holidays (Halloween) in 2006. Photos Billi J. Miller.



Sherry Clark's last hug from her son the night he deployed on February 20, 2007.

**It's Time to Rumble**  
**STRIKE UP NEW FRIENDSHIPS...**  
**JOIN A LEAGUE!**  
**10 Year Anniversary**

**Beginners Welcome and ALL SKILL LEVELS!**

**JOIN AS a Team or as an Individual**

**GLOW BOWL Friday & Saturday**

**Adult League Starts September 2nd**  
**55 + League Starts September 5th**  
**Public Bowl Starts September 5th**  
**Kids Bowl Starts September 23rd after school.**

**Adult Mixed on Monday 7:00pm**  
**Ladies League Tuesday 1:00pm**  
**Cash League (mixed) Tuesday 8:00pm**  
**Mixed Wednesday 7:00pm**  
**Senior Bowl Every Monday & Friday 1:00pm**  
**Kid's Every Tuesday After School**  
**Public Bowling Every Friday, Saturday & Sunday**

**Contact Kim to Register or For More Info**  
**853-4311 or 581-4218**  
**STRIKER LANES**